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ABSTRACT

The internship program in technical communications at Oklahoma State University is a 3-credit-hour course that offers students an opportunity to apply the principles of technical communication learned in the classroom to an on-the-job situation. The prerequisites for the course are 9 hours of English and a course on intermediate technical/professional report writing. Students are also encouraged to complete an advanced technical/professional writing course and a course on scientific and technical editing. Once the student employers and projects are determined, students are assigned any academic work needed for them to be able to complete their internship successfully. In addition to the academic modules assigned, students are expected to keep a record of all application materials and to complete progress reports, a final report, and a log book for all academic and on-the-job work. Employers evaluate their interns twice. Most of the internships involve a specific project (e.g., revising a booklet, writing a brochure), although a few involve working a set number of hours per week rather than completing a project. Regardless, students put in a total of at least 120 hours for both academic and on-the-job work. The goal now is to expand the program so that students can complete full-time paid internships. (A list of internship forms and projects is appended.) (HOD)

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THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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An Internship in Technical Communications offers students an opportunity to apply the principles of technical communication learned in the classroom to an on-the-job situation. English 4523, Internship in Technical Writing, at Oklahoma State University is a 3-credit-hour course that is offered during the fall and spring semesters and during the summer session. Most of the time the students are not paid, and usually they complete projects for the employers rather than work a specified number of hours weekly. The employers include university faculty and administrators; persons in business, industry, and government; and others in the surrounding community. The course is a junior/senior level one that graduate students can take.

Initial Program

Dr. Tom Warren, Director of Technical Writing, began the internship in 1977 when he came to OSU. The prerequisites were and still are 9 hours of English and English 3323, Intermediate Technical/Professional Report Writing. The course included 8 weeks in the classroom when he taught items not normally covered in the preceding classes, or covered only slightly (for example, audience analysis, editing and style, and graphics) and 8 weeks on the job. Each part, the classroom work and the on-the-job work, involved approximately 60 hours of work or a total of 120 hours.

Revision of the Program

I began supervising the program in the Fall of 1981. (See Appendix I for a list of the forms I use to administer the program.) I have adapted the

program established by Dr. Warren so that I determine the requirements for students according to their backgrounds (both work and academic experience). I assume, like Dr. Warren did, that the internship should involve approximately 120 hours (6 to 9 hours per week minimum for a 3-credit-hour course: 3 hours in the classroom with 3 to 6 hours outside the classroom).

Although the program is flexible and students may take the internship any time after they have completed the intermediate technical writing course, I have them take the course after they have completed English 4533, Advanced Technical/Professional Writing, and English 4543, Technical and Scientific Editing. Then they have less academic work to do, and they can spend more time on the job. Also by that time they have improved their writing skills and I don't have to help them so much with their projects.

An internship program can still be established in schools offering only introductory or intermediate technical writing courses; it is not necessary that the school offer a technical writing minor or major. An effective internship program depends upon the director and students finding projects that the students can complete successfully with their particular backgrounds and some independently directed academic work.

The Internship Project Selected. I have a file of internship vacancies but I find that the internship is most satisfactory when students do most of the work to find their own projects and employers. Usually, though, the students and I work together. They suggest possible ideas for the internship and I make suggestions. I consider the suggested projects in terms of students' academic and work experiences. We find the project or projects that I estimate will take the number of hours the students will spend on the job.

The Academic Work Required. When the students and I have determined who their employers will be and what their project(s) will be, I then assign any academic work needed for them to be able to complete their internship successfully. For instance, students who are writing manuals, but who have not had the advanced technical writing course in which students learn how to write manuals, have to prepare an annotated bibliography for that subject. Students who have not had much theory about audience analysis do additional preparation in that area. If students will need to prepare graphics for their projects, then I assign them the necessary work.

In addition to the academic "modules" assigned, students complete the following items:

- whatever is necessary for them to apply for the position with their employers (for example, submit job application letters and resumes, have an interview, or complete "contracts")
- progress report(s)
- a final report
- a log book for all academic and on-the-job work which includes the date, the time worked, a description of duties, and comments*

Employers' Evaluations. The employers evaluate the interns twice. I ask employers to contact me if there are any problems or if they have any questions. I receive progress reports from the students and I check on what

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*The comments section includes matters such as problems encountered, academic training or work experience that the students have had that is helpful, techniques they discover that make the work they are doing easier, differences in the work for their projects and the work that they do as students, and a procedure they might revise and the way they would revise it.

they are doing; for instance, the students must let me see what they have done before they submit final projects to their employers. For the most part, though, I try to let students and employers work together without me interfering. I tell employers to treat students as they would if the students were paid employees.

The Hours Required. As I indicated earlier, students should put in a total of 120 hours for both the academic and on-the-job work. I don't want to penalize good students who work fast or to not require as much as I should of weak students who take longer; therefore, I allow the range to be 110 hours to 130 hours. If students' projects take them much less than the 110 hours, then I assign additional work. If the students' projects take more than 130 hours, I give additional credit. I stress to students that they must complete the internship since the internship program involves employers. What students do in the course reflects not just on them but on our program. If they don't finish their projects or do unsatisfactory work, then they have hurt our entire internship program.

Description of Projects. As was true when Dr. Warren directed the internship program, students complete a variety of projects. (See Appendix II for a summary of the projects students have completed since I began directing the program in 1981.) Most of the internships are non-paying ones, although there are sometimes paying ones. For example, the intern who worked at Halliburton Services in Duncan, Oklahoma, was a paid employee. She served a dual function of computer programmer and technical writer/editor; she worked a 40 hour week for 2 months during the summer. The Oklahoma State University Arts and Sciences Institutional Research Department would employ the right intern part time (approximately 20 hours per week) for a semester or probably for as long as the intern continued in school.

Most of the internships are also project ones, although a few involve working a set number of hours per week rather than completing a project (for example, the one at Halliburton mentioned above). Also I have had two students complete an internship at the State Department of Vo-Tech in Stillwater. For that internship, students work 120 hours (usually 20 hours per week for 6 weeks) doing whatever the supervising person wants them to do. As long as the student has some training in grammar and writing (those majoring or minoring in English, journalism, or technical writing qualify), there are no other requirements. However, the more training students have in technical communications, the more specialized the work they can be assigned to.

My students have done a variety of projects for many different employers. Persons directing an internship program need use only their imaginations to find suitable on-the-job experiences for their students. Some examples of projects are

- revising a booklet used by a local pediatrician
- writing a brochure for the Domestic Violence Center
- writing, editing, and producing a newsletter for Parents and Teachers For Young Children
- editing (copy and production) a book of papers presented at the 1982 Southwest Cultural Heritage Festival at Oklahoma State University
- editing a curriculum manual and preparing it for the printers
- writing instructions for students using a computer simulation program for breeding cattle

My goal is to exapnd our program so that students also have the opportunity to complete paid internships that consist of full-time work either in the summer or during a semester. Currently, however, our internship program gives

students the practical, on-the-job experience needed to train them satisfactorily to meet the demands of the world outside of academia.

Appendix I

Internship Forms

General Information	Log
Vacancy	Progress Report
Application	Final Report
Assignment Sheet	Mid-term Evaluation
Employer "Contract"	Final Evaluation
Employee "Contract"	

Appendix II

Internship Projects

Employer	Job Title	Job Description/Duties
Stillwater Pediatrician	Technical Editor/Writer	Revise booklet "A Guide to Health Care of Infants and Children"
Stillwater Domestic Violence Center, Inc.	Writer/Editor	Write a brochure stating what the center does, what services are offered, what the statistics are, what the Rape Crisis Team is. Also, compile a list of different printers' costs for printing brochure.
Parents and Teachers for Young Children	Technical Writer	Write a newsletter, compile a resource directory, assist in writing a magazine article.

Employer	Job Title	Job Description/Duties
Petroleum Technology and Mechanical Power (OSU)	Technical Writer	Research the program and present the material in a brochure that explains the Petroleum & Mechanical Power Program to industry.
English Department (OSU)	Technical Writer	Revise the Department's Course Description Book and write 2 newsletters.
Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry (OSU)	Technical Writer	Research a computer simulation program for breeding cattle. Write a handout for students and a brochure for farmers. Write a brochure describing the graduate program in agriculture.
State Department of Vo-Tech	Curriculum Proofreader and Editor	Edit and proofread assigned projects. Work with technical writers.
Plant Pathology (OSU)	Technician/ Technical Writer	Revise and edit papers for journal publication
Halliburton, Duncan, OK	Computer Programmer/ Technical Writer	Revise training manual and other ones. Prepare evaluation form for training program.
Public Information Office, Engineering Technology (OSU)	Information Editor and Writer	Research and write articles. Edit articles. Prepare and distribute press releases.
Arts & Science College (OSU)	Assistant Editor (copy & production)	Edit copy for book of papers presented at 1982 Southwest Cultural Heritage Festival (included tables, graphs, & photographs.) Prepare copy for typesetter and follow it through printing.